

# THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

*This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.*

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## "RECONSTRUCTING A SHATTERED WORLD" SCOTTISH MODERATOR ON THE CHURCH'S SHARE

In his address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the new Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Andrew J. Campbell, D.D., Minister at Evie, said:

"We have come once more to an epoch of overturning and rebuilding. I say 'once more,' because the Church has a tenacious memory and can call to mind how, since she was first sent out upon her mission, she has more than once or twice seen the world around her fall miserably to pieces. In the work of reconstructing a shattered world the Church of Christ, and this branch of His Church, has a part to play—not in the sense of being one more among the institutions which confer and collide, but in the sense that our first charge is to proclaim anew in the language of our own time 'the truth by which the nations live.'

"The Church identifies itself with no form of secular government, no type of social structure, no system of economic organization. These are matters of great importance, sufficient to have kept men's minds and tongues busy since the dawn of history; and churchmen have the right and the duty as individuals to study them, to form personal opinions regarding them, and to advocate those opinions. But that is quite secondary to the fundamental truth to which every type of social organization can, if it choose, bear witness—that there is no true life unless it be founded on the Law of God and seek to carry it out; and that law is set forth plainly in Scripture, and especially in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is for the Church to pro-

claim to all men this fundamental truth. It is for her to produce the men who, having received the truth into their hearts, make it the groundwork of their actions and seek to bring it to bear on all their political and social activities. It is for her to create the public opinion which will be the atmosphere in which men work. I would urge the Church, the people of the Church, and especially the ministers of the Church, that, with all their rightful interest in the great things which we discuss and plan, they forget not the greatest thing—that repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed among all nations.' Repentance and remission of sins to all the nations. Have we grown accustomed to think of these words as concerned only with individual piety? Ponder them well in the light of what is said about them in Scripture, and you will see that they have a bearing, not only upon the individual, but also upon the great political, social, and international matters which fill our newspapers to-day.

"I close with three thoughts, all springing from what I have sought to say. For one thing, the Church must in these days discover afresh her unity. That unity is a spiritual fact, not waiting to be created, but already existent. We must cherish it and cultivate it, even when we find ourselves coming up against barriers which for the moment seem insurmountable.

"For another thing, we of the Church of Scotland must do the job which we have been appointed to do. That job is to till our own

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vineyard—this vineyard of Scotland, our own beloved Scotland. During this General Assembly we have heard of many things to be done in our vineyard—Church Extension, the work among the young, the recruiting for the ministry, the factory chaplaincies, and the innumerable details of our work. Let us remember, too, that our vineyard is as wide as the world, and that as a branch of the Catholic Church we must 'go and make disciples of all the nations.' These things let us do, and do well. And being Scotsmen, let us keep also in mind how in these days our land is beset with many difficulties—concerning her fisheries, her agriculture, her old industries, her new industries, her schools, her housing, or the depopulation of our beautiful northern counties. Whatever concerns the welfare of our Scottish people is the concern also of the Scottish Church, and we will further it as well as we can. But when we have noted all our national interests and all our churchly concerns, let us remember that God planted this Church of Scotland in order that it might nourish a living faith in Him, as the well-spring of all good work. 'Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.'

#### PASTOR NIEMÖLLER'S INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY THOMPSON

By the courtesy of the North American Newspaper Alliance we are able to print, *verbatim*, the article by Dorothy Thompson on her interview with Pastor Niemöller. It appeared in *The Observer* for May 20th, 1945.

If a man is eight years in prison or behind barbed wire, four of them in solitary confinement for refusing to render to Cæsar the things that are God's; if, meanwhile, his sons are killed or missing in action, having been forced to fight for their father's jailers, several things can happen to him. He can find that God has forsaken him. He can become cynical. He can take refuge in the mysticism of other worlds against the realities of life. Or he can become strengthened and purified to an incandescent faith and an unassailable inner freedom.

To Martin Niemöller the last has happened. All the trials of Job have befallen him. Of his family of seven children, only two are certainly alive with their mother. He has seen the country which he was too sternly honest ever to reject as his own defeated, abased, ruined, and despised, as he foresaw it would be when it bent the knee to the golden calf and evil power.

He does not know whether in a hundred years Germany will live again in civilization and honour, but he knows in what he believes and for which he suffered, and that sets him apart from the run of men. It gave him authority even amongst the beastly jailers who never lifted a hand against him, and it gives him now a spiritual authority possessed perhaps by no other individual in Protestant Christendom.

#### A Nation Adrift

I encountered him in the place to which he had been removed with Dr. Kurt von Schnnigg, M. Leon Blum, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, Prince Phillip Hesse, and many others who were taken by the American Army from their last internment place after Dachau.

We met under conditions which made it possible for us to have quiet and extended conversations. He is a man from whom fear has forever flown. Boyishly slim, wiry, nervous but disciplined, he is full of simplicity and humility. His brown eyes look steadily at you as he speaks, and when he smiles his face lights up with kindness and peace.

He did not rehearse his sufferings but spoke at length on the possible future of Germany. He refused to offer a didactic opinion, reminding me that he had been isolated for years from the contact of anyone but his wife, and she, too, had lost track of most of their old friends in his congregation in recent months.

But if he has no opinions, he has strong instincts born of long years of concentrated meditation and intense spiritual exercise. The disaster which he foresaw and prophesied has come. Nor does he underrate it in the slightest degree.

"The German people are entirely adrift," he said. "They have lost confidence in everything. All their political creeds, social ideologies, have been betrayed. All their leaders, political, economic, intellectual and military, and even the scholars and the great institutions of learning went on their knees to Hitler and the Reichswehr, which once stood for some sort of morale of the State, threw out or assassinated the ablest leaders for Hitler's sake.

#### All Germany Corrupted

"There is literally nothing left in German life that is not corrupted and compromised. It is foolish to think that a democratic Germany will arise in the near future. Germany must be governed by the victors. Otherwise



the wholesale meaningless slaughter ending in chaos, disintegration and despair remains.

"To my mind there is just one institution which never wholly yielded up faith and which, though without practical results, kept alive in people their recollection of morality and hope for a better world. That is the Christian Church. The crisis in Germany was moral and spiritual, and Germany must be rebuilt from moral and spiritual foundations, for it was in these that collapse began.

"Under Hitler thousands of Germans rediscovered what religion means. Faith cut across creeds. I myself went on a pilgrimage in 1937 to the Catholic Bishop von Galen of Münster to stretch out my hand and to read his pastoral letters from my pulpit. This was something that had never happened before in Protestant Germany. The proportion of ministers who testified to God against Hitler was larger than any political group. It included princes of the Church, like Abbot Metten, head of the greatest Benedictine monastery of Bavaria, and simple curates, and priests. I believe that the German people have an unassuaged spiritual hunger after righteousness and truth. That is the only positive force I discern.

"Above all, I pray that the four Powers who administer Germany will be able to agree to work together on a common programme. Should Germany be divided into separate spiritual spheres it would be the last terrible fate for my country and civilization. Altogether it would mean no peace, and a breach of the peace would bring the dark ages for centuries."

I asked about Communism, and he replied: "I do not think the people turn naturally toward the political aspects of Communism, not because of economic doctrines—any economic system making it possible to sustain mere life would be acceptable. But any system that suppresses personal conscience on behalf of the state and party seems too much like Nazism.

"I pray that Western civilization and Russian Communism may reconcile their systems and learn from one another.

"Which way Germany will turn depends on how the Occupying Powers meet the spiritual and intellectual hunger of the people.

"I have read that the Russians, while dealing sternly with the leaders, have pity on the people and fraternize with them. Now when they know that they are hated by mankind, they will turn towards that as towards light."

When I asked him what he wanted personally to do, he said: "I would like to have my

wife and two children to join me and then go to England and America to talk to the Christian leaders, for I, too, have a spiritual hunger to satisfy.

"Then I would like to return to preach the Gospel of the Living Christ to my own people. I have had a long time to meditate on the meaning of life."

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## "RÉFORME": A NEW FRENCH CHRISTIAN JOURNAL

The pioneering and adventuring spirit of French Protestants who have been through the period of occupation and resistance is expressed in a new and skilfully edited journal published in Paris weekly under the title of *Réforme*. It is an attractive newspaper with well-produced pictures. The tone of the magazine is one which might be described as that of Christian realism. It deals very plainly with the evil régime which has been brought to nothing by the Allied victory. It is equally realistic about the spiritual problems and tasks which lie before Europe and before the Christian Churches of Europe in the hour of victory. As an example of the tone of this magazine, we print a translation of a short leading article in the number dated May 12th:

"At last here we are: Germany conquered, occupied, crushed by the Allied armies; Germany condemned to capitulate, Hitler dead, Goebbels and Goering disappeared, those in the German Army who have escaped death prisoners by the thousand.

"It is the most gigantic collapse of history and it is natural that in spite of the weariness which possesses us after our long wait, joy should illuminate these extraordinary days which mark the return of peace.

"Our country, and with it Christian civilization, were very nearly engulfed for ever in the brown night of Nazism. Our lack of conscience and our indifference as well as that of our Allies had permitted the old German colossus to re-awaken, to equip itself and to draw the sword.

"At last we had taken possession of ourselves but it was too late. In 1942, after the collapse of Poland and France and the defeats in Russia, Germany seemed to be mistress of Europe and the world.

"However, we did not despair. We were not willing to believe that the world could be submerged by barbarism and our voice was that of true wisdom.



"In these conditions, which appeared desperate, clear-minded and courageous men with Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle at their head arrived to change the face of the world.

"Those who gave up all can measure to-day the scale of the catastrophe which threatened us: it is only necessary for them to have a short discussion with someone who has escaped from Buchenwald or Auschwitz.

"That is why we are joyous, but joyous with a grave joy like that of a mother who has just snatched her child from a burning house.

"We are surrounded by ruins, not only those of our destroyed towns, and we live in the midst of an immense wave of suffering, the suffering of those who have been tortured by hunger, by misery, by the sadism of their assassins, the suffering of those whose courage deserted them when the tormenters lashed their flesh and pushed them into the gas chamber or the crematorium furnace.

"The thought of austerity is with us too. We have not been able to restore order except through fire and our bombs and shells have had no means of distinguishing between the barbarism of the S.S. and the innocence of the child.

"Sin, which all but devoured the world, remains with us. We know that our own strength unaided is powerless to overcome it. We can thus only turn to God and bring our prayer to Him, 'Thy Kingdom Come.'"

## THE SPIRIT OF OUR THANKSGIVING

The Bishop of Peterborough writes in his Diocesan Leaflet:

"I am writing this letter on Thanksgiving Day, the day so long looked for, which has come at last. It has been very different from what we expected. We thought that all of a sudden, almost without giving us a moment to prepare, it would be upon us. But that is not what has happened. Though events did move to a crisis with astonishing rapidity during the last weeks of war, and though we could see quite plainly that the end was near, yet we slid, almost unconsciously, into the announcement of unconditional surrender on May 8th, and the cessation of hostilities, when it came, seemed somehow to be long overdue. The result has been that the giving of thanks has been much less violent and impulsive than we had believed possible. Our people have taken it calmly and with dignity, and everywhere it has been the same. I hope that, when the history of the war is written,

that will be remembered. I note that there are a great many mis-statements about the ending of the last war and the reaction of our people to it, and I should like here and now to set down on paper my tribute to my fellow countrymen in the hour of their greatest triumph: no boasting, no disorder, no glorification of armed might, only a glad acceptance of God's gracious gift of peace.

"I trust that, in the days to come, we shall still show the same steadfast, even temper that has marked our people in the days which lie behind us. We shall need it. All sorts of problems have still to be faced. A major war has to be finished, and it will tax all our resources, and demand the service of many of our young and active men, to finish it. Rationing is going to continue for some time, and, in spite of its necessity when so much of Europe has to be fed and clothed, will soon become irksome and galling. Most of the men and women who have volunteered so bravely for the Forces will want to get back to their own homes and families and to civil employment as quickly as they can. The United Nations will not be an easy team to drive, whoever holds the reins, and some of those countries which have done least for the common cause may prove the most obstreperous. These are some of the difficulties which must be faced, and they will meet us just at the time when we are tired after six years of endurance and want to be quit of all these troubles.

"This is where we Christians come in, and where the worth of our religion will be tested. We shall have to show patience, fortitude and readiness to make sacrifice and bear inconveniences, and to set the example which those ought to show who have learnt to see things in their true proportion. Whatever happens, we must not fail in the day of returning peace, when we have endured so staunchly throughout the years of war. The Government of this country will have a right to look to us for a lead in the right direction, and they must not look in vain. And, both in Church and outside it, we must be as persistent in our prayers as we have ever been. We may not feel as if we were the kind of people to determine events; we may seem to be quite unimportant; but it is we who can, by our praying, uphold the hands of those who have the greater responsibility, and release those spiritual forces which are so greatly needed for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Our task becomes greater, not smaller, now that the European War is over. Let us not be found wanting."